



# NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

## NEWSLETTER



# MAY 2022

### Your New Chairman



### Andrew Graham

Although I was not born directly into a farming family, my father had cousins who were farmers in Cumbria and the south west of Scotland, and so I guess this is why I have always been interested in the industry and have spent my working life in the supply side. I was a student at Cirencester Agricultural College long before it became a university and after a few interim jobs I joined West Midland Farmers, a farmers co-operative based in Llanthony Mills, Gloucester. I worked from the Thornbury branch up onto the Cotswolds and this furthered my interest in arable farming. During this time, I trained up to be a DEFRA licenced seed inspector and to be a qualified advisor on crop protection.

To further my career, I joined a co-operative seed company in west Wales which grew and processed cereal seed and some grass seed for its members which were the farmers co-ops throughout Wales. I stayed with this business until I retired.

I then spent 9 years volunteering at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, hill and coastal walking with Ramblers and wood working. We then moved back to Gloucestershire to be nearer family but continue to lead walks for Ramblers and maintain an allotment.

Since I transferred from St Peters Probus, Carmarthen to Newent Probus, our membership has fallen for a number of reasons as has been the case for many other clubs. Some have merged and some have gone. It is my ambition that we aim to increase membership by continuing to arrange interesting speakers and again arrange day trips and theatre trips both of which have been casualties of Covid. Most of all membership of our club must be enjoyable and interesting.

## Your New Vice-Chairman Mike Townsend



I started work as an Apprentice Electrician in Newent in 1961. On my very first day we were digging a trench putting in an underground cable to a barn on a farm just outside of Newent. In my enthusiasm on digging the trench I hit a plastic water pipe, so my first day I learned how to repair a water pipe. I then went on to work for Simon Barron, feed milling engineers, based in Gloucester. After my apprenticeships I then went into electronics, working for Thorn EMI, for over 27 years. I started as an Engineer and finished up as a Technical Support Manager. I then worked for Xerox, based in Mitcheldean for several years as a Manufacturing Engineer. I travelled to the USA and Holland on various secondments. One of the most interesting jobs I completed, was converting digital copier printers to 110 volts for the Royal Navy and making sure the scanner on the machines would not dislodge in rough seas. I went with a technician to Devonport, Plymouth, to install them on HMS Cornwall. In my last job I was a Technical Manager for a large electrical installation contracting company, which does all the domestic wiring for all the major house builders. As part of my retirement wind-down, I just worked 3 days a week, I helped at the Probation Service, supervising offenders on community payback on various projects, Dean Forest Railway and Apperley Cricket Club, to name just a few. I retired completely in May 2011.

I have been a Parish Councillor on Westbury on Severn Parish Council for over 10 years. We meet every month, discussing planning applications, highways, Westbury Closed Churchyard, burial ground, and lots of other issues. One of the areas I oversee is footpaths in Westbury on Severn Parish, we have 55 miles of them, carrying out safety checks and maintenance of the children's play area. The Parish Council bought for a £1.00 a BT telephone box in Northwood Green, renovated, painted and converted it into a book exchange, which is very popular.

I have been a member of Westbury on Severn Young Farmers Club for 60 years, I recently stood down as President, after 15 years, I am now an Honorary Member and stand on the advisory committee. We are the longest surviving club in the country and celebrate our 100 years in 2027.

I am a trustee of Northwood Green Social Hall and of course I am a recent member of Newent Probus.

I enjoy gardening, especially growing vegetables. We have 2 Labradors, so enjoy walking them, lots of nice walks around our village. I enjoy cycling and have recently purchased an electric bike, where you don't have to pedal too hard. We travel on holiday to Dingle, Co Kerry, Southern Ireland, normally twice a year. We take the dogs with us and go by ferry. We have made lots of friends over the years and always meet up or stay with them. I manage to do a bit of fishing, nothing better than eating what you have caught. Jane, my partner a State Registered Nursing Sister, for the NHS, has recently retired after 42 years, so we will be able to travel more often and have days out without having to get back for work.

## YOUR COMMITTEE AND ASSOCIATES FOR 2022/23



John Weeden hands over the reins to new chairman Andrew Graham

### Club Officers

CHAIRMAN:	Andrew Graham
VICE CHAIRMAN:	Mike Townsend
PAST CHAIRMAN:	John Weeden
TREASURER:	Mike Warburton
SECRETARY:	Fraser Gunn

### Committee:

WEBMASTER:	Ray McCairn
PROGRAMME SECRETARY:	<b>Vacant</b>
OUTINGS:	David Clowes
THEATRE TRIPS:	Andrew Graham
SPECIAL LUNCHESES:	John Martin

### Ancillary positions:

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:	<b>Vacant</b>
PUB LUNCHESES:	Peter Hines
TECHNICAL TEAM:	Richard Crisp John Franklin Ray McCairn Mike Townsend
RAFFLE ORGANISER:	Chris Lathan





After the formalities of the AGM were completed and in the absence of a formal speaker, we were all wondering what the members “tales of the unexpected” would consist of. As this was the idea of your new Chairman, **Andrew Graham**, it was very fitting that he took the lead and recounted an experience of his own. Andrew was working for an agricultural seed company in Pembrokeshire, West Wales who contracted out the growing of cereal seeds such as Barley, Oats and Rye to farmers in that region. One of his responsibilities was to inspect the crops in fields to ensure that they were of a good enough standard, the right variety, colour etc. He said that in some large fields, inspections could last a couple of hours. He then asked whether the names of Richard & Helen Thomas and a date of Dec 1985 were familiar to anyone. Unsurprisingly they weren’t but the second names he gave of Peter and Gwenda Dixon from 1989, were recognised as having been murdered. A man called John Cooper was subsequently convicted of both the Thomas and Dixon murders, some two decades later. The Dixons bodies were discovered near the coastal path in the immediate vicinity of a field that Andrew had to inspect. He was unaccompanied and feeling distinctly uneasy, as not only had the killer not been apprehended at that time but there was also some media speculation that the IRA might have been involved. Needless to say, that crop inspection was one of his quicker ones!

**Chris Lathan** was second up, to recount his incredible experience which occurred in the late 1970’s, when he was a member of Rugby Scuba Club. A group of 10 had gone drift diving in the North Sea, South of the Farne Islands in the area of Seahouses. Chris explained that two divers would go down, their position marked by a buoy and would then drift with the current, going with the flow. They were approximately a mile offshore and were just able to make out land. Unfortunately, visibility deteriorated to about 100 yds, so they signalled the divers to surface by the usual method of revving the engine. The divers were obviously enjoying the dive they didn’t appear straight away, by which time visibility had dropped further to 10 metres. Although they knew they had been drifting South, they had no idea of the distance covered, which could have been several miles. However, they had compasses and knew that by going North and at some point, turning to the West, they would come to land. After they had set off North, two seals appeared alongside their boat and swam with them for some time. They had to make a decision when to change course to the West but before they did so the seals started swimming in that direction. They decided to follow and landed on a beach, not knowing where they were, which could have been on one of the Farne Islands.

However, upon hearing a car, they soon realised that by following the seals they had been led back to a point just 100 yards from the car park from where they had set off!

**David Clowes** was next to recall an amusing incident also from the late 1970’s. He was working for West Midlands County Council at the time that they introduced a revolutionary Traffic Control Scheme in Coventry. This system was at the forefront of traffic & automotive technology, which was considered to be the best in the world. Although developed in conjunction with companies such as Plessey, Siemens and GEC, it was the government who were very proactive in promoting this new technology to China and to the governments of many other countries. There were numerous guest visits involving the Departments of Trade and Transport who came to see the new system and visited the Motorway Control Centre situated alongside the M6 in Perry Barr, Birmingham. One such visit was of a Chinese Group which caused some panic. David was asked to meet a very Senior Chinese person who was arriving at Coventry Railway Station on a certain train. He went to the station and met a Chinese gentleman who confirmed his name was Dr Sin. He spoke very little English but David tried to have a conversation with him during the five-minute walk back to the office. When they started to show him the traffic system his eyes seemed to glaze over. All he said was B-l-itt-ish C-e -lan-ese (said with possibly a bad Mandarin accent!) This was interpreted as British Celanese, a subsidiary of Courtaulds, also located in Coventry. After contacting them, they confirmed that a Chinese visitor had been expected but that he hadn’t arrived. David quickly went back to the station where the right Dr Sin was still waiting. He wondered what are the chances of two Chinese Dr Sins being on the same train.

**John Weeden** then followed with some historical facts regarding his family history on his mother’s side. Taking advantage of a generous offer through Ancestry.co.uk, he trailed back through censuses and other documents and discovered that his grandfather Reuben Holt was aged 3 and living with another family and described as a foundling. The Foundling Hospital, which was founded in 1739, took in infants of fallen women. There was great shame involved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries if a single woman had a baby and they were known as fallen women. If they were lucky, they could pass the baby to the Foundling Hospital to be brought up there, and go on to live a good and wholesome life themselves. John subsequently discovered through additional research, that surprisingly his grandmother, Marion Alnutt, who was Reuben’s wife, had also been a foundling. John’s grandparents and parents would not have been able to trace their birth mother’s names, had they wished to, as there was a 130-year ban on them being revealed

This period had actually just expired, enabling John to discover that one was called Ann Judd and the other Florence Plume.

Ann had been working at a bakers in London and whilst left on the premises with just an assistant baker he had raped her and was the father of her child. The father disappeared when he found out. Florence Plume had lost both of her parents to Cholera and took over the running of their pub in Plaistow, East London at the age of sixteen. Her story was similar in that she was raped by one of the pub regulars, although John suspected that there must have been an element of consent as they were supposedly engaged to be married. Unbeknown to her at the time, the man was already married and had three children. He too disappeared.

John never knew if his mother was told her parents were foundlings, and if she did know whether she told his father. They never told John. Sadly, it seemed that John could claim the rather startling facts that both his grandparents on his mother's side had been raped.

Finally, **Fraser Gunn** told us about his time in the fire service and two particularly harrowing experiences from the 1980's. Up until that time he had seen a lot of deaths in gruesome events but had not been personally affected by them. However, in June 1986 he attended a road traffic accident on the M4 near Maidenhead and when he arrived there were blue lights everywhere and two fire engines already on the scene. A transit van, carrying 9 students' home from Glastonbury, were killed when it crossed over the highway barrier flattening a car, killing 4 members of one family. Fraser said that he had finally got home at around 2am but was then being interviewed by the BBC and other media at 9am. He said bodies and wreckage from the van, with its sides ripped open, were strewn across the highway. He had been in the brigade for 20 years and had never seen anything like it. It was his worst; distressing experience and he was clearly deeply moved by it.

Another horrific M4 crash happened in March 1991 near Hungerford in heavy fog. A van driver, who had fallen asleep, crashed his vehicle and then other vehicles travelling behind crashed into the wreckage. A number of the vehicles caught fire and of the 11 people who died, most of them were burnt to death. This was one of the worst crashes ever seen on a British motorway, which had quickly involved 51 vehicles.

## **CHURCH NOTICES IN NEED OF DIVINE GUIDANCE**



***The sermon this morning "Jesus walks on water"***  
***The sermon tonight: "In search of Jesus"***

***"Don't let worry kill you" Let the Church help***

***The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind, they may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.***

***Next Thursday will be the try-out for the choir.... They need all the help they can get.***

## **LIONS OR PROBUS**

**Two men were having a drink in the local pub**

**"Did you know" said one, "Lions make love 10 – 15 times a week?"**

**Damn! replied the other, "I have just joined Probus"**

## THE MYSTERIOUS “JACK IN THE GREEN”



This is the first time that I can recall members singing in accompaniment to a speaker and in remarkably good voice too. Perhaps we should form a choir! Any candidates for the post of choirmaster?

Mike Bottomly, a fellow Probian from Gloucester, spoke entertainingly on Folk traditions in the County and beyond and it was the nostalgia driven video clip of the late Terry Wogan singing “The Cornish Floral Dance”, aka “The Furry Dance” that had member’s feet tapping and voices going. The song is native to the Cornish town of Helston where, on May Day the townspeople, dressed in their finery, dance through this tiny Cornish town throughout the day.

Mike kicked off by recounting the tradition of the Green Man aka “Jack in the Green”, a slightly scary character, perhaps a remnant of a pagan fertility rite. Certainly, a woodland figure as evidenced by the abundance of foliage around his person. Perhaps a close cousin to the Morris Men of just about everywhere in the dancing that accompanies him, he is gradually being resurrected in many parts of the county and beyond.

Another close relative must surely be the “Obby Oss”, a key figure in the dance of Padstow, which at least proves that the town has something else to offer than the ubiquitous Rick Stein and his fish. This dance welcomes the coming of Spring and, to the accompaniment of a haunting drumbeat is a daylong festive occasion

Much nearer home, Gloucester’s own “Cheese Roll” was mentioned. Again, linked to the coming of Spring, it is yet another rite which, although believed medieval in origin, has been revived within the last century and, for a purpose which is unclear, involves brave, if not foolhardy entrants, hurling themselves down a precipitous 1 in 2 slope in pursuit of a cheese; the first to reach the bottom unscathed claims the cheese.

Mike, continuing the theme of locally based traditions, then gave a brief summary of one peculiar, if not native to, Gloucestershire. Randwick, near Stroud has an annual Wap fair which is thought to have been once a hiring fair where would be serving maids and agricultural workers, dressed in their Sunday best, lined up to offer themselves to employers. Just up the road, in Bisley, the village’s profusion of natural springs and wells, is treated to an annual dressing of flowers and foliage by local school children, with a blessing by the local vicar. Wassailing is carried on throughout the county, including here in Newent.

Wassailing is a Twelfth Night tradition that has been practised in Britain for centuries. It has its roots in a pagan custom of visiting orchards to sing to the trees and spirits in the hope of ensuring a good harvest the following season. During the visit a communal wassail bowl – filled with a warm spiced cider, perry or ale – would be shared amongst revellers.

Fittingly, we ended with another song “The First Day in Spring” with members slightly out of breath, either from the unaccustomed exertion of singing or a tinge of embarrassment, whichever it was is best left open! A well-received talk with a difference for which Mike was thanked.

*Peter Hayes*

# UPCOMING EVENTS



## PUB LUNCH



**3<sup>rd</sup> MAY 12.30**  
**The Trumpet Inn**  
**Pixley**



**10<sup>th</sup> MAY**  
**Brian Ely**  
**The World of Precious Metals**

**Precious metals** are rare, naturally occurring metallic chemical elements of high economic value. Chemically, the precious metals tend to be less reactive than most elements. They are usually ductile and have a high lustre. Historically, precious metals were important as currency but are now regarded mainly as investment and industrial commodities



**24 MAY**  
**Paul Barnett**  
**Rout on the Riviera – The Slapton Sands**  
**Disaster**

On the night of 27th April 1944 during World War Two, a terrible tragedy unfolded just off Slapton Sands on the coast of Devon. 946 American servicemen died during Exercise Tiger, the rehearsals for the D-Day landing on Utah Beach in Normandy, France.

# BEING A FREEMAN OF THE CITY OF GLOUCESTER

**Peter Hayes**



How I became a Freeman of the City of Gloucester is easy – just the way that Prince Charles will become our king – we both had the right sort of ancestor. Less easy is what my distant ancestor did to deserve that honour. Unlike his, mine probably was not much of a warrior who did not go in for wholesale slaughter, thievery and pillage. This much is known: 9X grandad Samuel was a silk weaver, recently descended from the Cotswolds to the Vale, when he was created a Freeman (and Alderman it must be added) in 1631. In those days the Order was linked to property ownership so grandad Samuel must have been pretty good at silk weaving. That, or the 17<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of a “brown paper envelope” changed hands in a smoke-filled room full of worthies sucking on their clay pipes and so Gran joined the ruling gentry. It was about the time of the persecution of the Flemish Huguenots and a large number of them are known to have emigrated to England. The Huguenots were famously silk weavers and, who knows, perhaps I have Flemish ancestry?



As a Freeman he would have all sorts of duties and obligations in those days, principal of which was the right to vote, a rare privilege in those days before universal suffrage and would have possibly been a magistrate. A major part of the Freeman’s duties would have been the granting of licences, and supervision thereof, of the City’s alehouses and pubs. Vast scope for all sort of jiggery pokery there you might think. More sadly, the right of “*Droit du Seigneur*” also known as *ius primae noctis* (right of the first night), was a supposed legal right in medieval Europe, allowing feudal lords to have sexual relations with subordinate women, in particular, on the wedding nights of the women, has long since lapsed, if indeed it ever existed.

I wish that I could point out some illustrious forebears among past Freemen; sadly not. However, if they have lapsed into anonymity, at least I have not been able to discover any villain or knaves among them. Probably best known among them is another Samuel who started off as a blacksmith in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century who, after receiving so many requests for accommodation from owners whose horses were being shod, realised that there was a demand for rooms. A demand which he set about filling and who eventually became a well-known figure “Mine Host Heath” the owner of the New Inn.



The jury is still out on whether it was the famous one in Northgate Street or a much humbler version along the London Road. Nevertheless, by the time of his death in 1721, according to his will, he had amassed the considerable sum of £700 (not far short of a million today). However, I regret that none of this trickled down to me, my relatives having got their sticky fingers on it long before I came along. We also had a noted cordwainer (a maker and designer of shoes) John who employed upwards of a dozen and who owned a large house in Westgate Street. (For local readers it is the one formerly occupied by Winfield's, noted seed merchants). The old saying "Clogs to clogs in three generations" still rings true" and we apparently fell upon hard times being reduced to living in one of the City's less salubrious areas, Clapham, and suffering several evictions. By then, we did not make shoes, we repaired them. Somehow the family survived my birth and today, alas, our duties are largely ceremonial. Once a year (in pre-covid times at least)- we march through the city accompanied by a token goat; this maintains our ancient privilege of driving at least two head of cattle or other livestock through the gates of the city without let, tolls or hindrance.

Others include the right to head any procession or parade passing through the City and to represent the mayor at ceremonies. The most recent one of these being when selected Freeman, of which I had the honour to be one, took the salute when what is now the successor of the Gloucestershire Regiment marched through the city on their return from a peacekeeping operation

The Heath line of Freemanship, of which I am one, is unusual in that succession passes down on both female and male line and the Heaths now comprise the largest single family. It is a strange feeling when at one of our meetings, to realise that you are related to most of those present. Some may scoff at our activities but, with so many of our traditions disappearing, I believe that we have a duty to preserve them.

**PH.**

### Sometime we can all have a bad day



*I wandered lonely as cloud  
that floats on high o'er dales and hills  
I've clean forgot my stomach pills  
As I wandered all around  
I knew I'd made a blunder  
for very soon you'd hear the sound  
of none too distant thunder  
Quite often at these times of strife  
I ask myself the question  
why is it at my time of life  
I get this indigestion.?*

**JS**



**Something special for  
that summer picnic?**

### **MAMA'S TIFFIN**



#### **Ingredients:**

250g Digestive Biscuits  
100g Raisins or any other dried fruit  
110g Unsalted butter  
50g Icing sugar or granulated sugar  
2tbsp Cocoa powder  
100g Any kind of chocolate (Dark is the best)  
1tsp Salt

#### **Method:**

1. Breakup biscuits by placing a food bag and bashing with a rolling pin. Transfer to a mixing bowl along with the raisins
2. Add the butter, sugar and cocoa into a saucepan and gently melt over a low heat for 3-5 minutes until fully melted.
3. Once it's a nice loose mix, remove from the heat.
4. Pour the butter mix over the biscuits and stir well to combine and fully coat.
5. Pile the mixture into a 25cm square baking tray lined with parchment paper and press down.
6. Melt the chocolate in a Bain Marie (or microwave in bursts, stirring each time) Then pour on the top of the tiffin mixture.
7. Lift the tray from side to side to ensure the chocolate is spread evenly. Sprinkle the salt on top and place in the fridge for 30 minutes to set.
8. **Slice up and enjoy.**

**That's all for now folks, hope to see you next month – Thanks to all those who submitted articles and help, particularly John Martin.  
Ed (temp)**

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